image

ISSUE 002

THE FORGED™

RUCKA · TRAUTMANN · HENDERSON · WOODARD · MAHER

SAVAGE COMBAT ON A MERCILESS MOON!

MACHINATIONS OF THE MIND WITCH!

CRAZY JO DISARMED!

THE FORGED™

CREATED BY

GREG RUCKA & ERIC TRAUTMANN and **MIKE HENDERSON**

STORY ART

COLORS BY **NOLAN WOODARD**
LETTERS BY **ARIANA MAHER**
DESIGN BY **ERIC TRAUTMANN**
EDITED BY **ALEJANDRO ARBONA**
LOGO DESIGN CONSULTANT **SASHA HEAD**

IMAGE COMICS, INC. • **Robert Kirkman**: Chief Operating Officer • **Erik Larsen**: Chief Financial Officer • **Todd McFarlane**: President • **Marc Silvestri**: Chief Executive Officer • **Jim Valentino**: Vice President • **Eric Stephenson**: Publisher / Chief Creative Officer • **Nicole Lapalme**: Vice President of Finance • **Leanna Caunter**: Accounting Analyst • **Sue Korpela**: Accounting & HR Manager • **Matt Parkinson**: Vice President of Sales & Publishing Planning • **Lorelei Bunjes**: Vice President of Digital Strategy • **Dirk Wood**: Vice President of International Sales & Licensing • **Ryan Brewer**: International Sales & Licensing Manager • **Alex Cox**: Director of Direct Market Sales • **Chloe Ramos**: Book Market & Library Sales Manager • **Emilio Bautista**: Digital Sales Coordinator • **Jon Schlaffman**: Specialty Sales Coordinator • **Kat Salazar**: Vice President of PR & Marketing • **Deanna Phelps**: Marketing Design Manager • **Drew Fitzgerald**: Marketing Content Associate • **Heather Doornink**: Vice President of Production • **Drew Gill**: Art Director • **Hilary DiLoreto**: Print Manager • **Tricia Ramos**: Traffic Manager • **Melissa Gifford**: Content Manager • **Erika Schnatz**: Senior Production Artist • **Wesley Griffith**: Production Artist • **Rich Fowlks**: Production Artist • **IMAGECOMICS.COM**

THE FORGED #2. April 2023. Published by Image Comics, Inc. Office of publication: PO BOX 14457, Portland, OR 97293. Copyright © 2023 Greg Rucka, Eric Trautmann & Mike Henderson. All rights reserved. "The Forged," its logos, and the likenesses of all characters herein are trademarks of Greg Rucka, Eric Trautmann & Mike Henderson, unless otherwise noted. "Image" and the Image Comics logos are registered trademarks of Image Comics, Inc. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means (except for short excerpts for journalistic or review purposes), without the express written permission of Greg Rucka, Eric Trautmann & Mike Henderson, or Image Comics, Inc. All names, characters, events, and locales in this publication are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons (living or dead), events, or places, without satiric intent, is coincidental. Digital edition. For international rights, contact: foreignlicensing@imagecomics.com.

For centuries, all of known space has been
the realm of **Her Eternal Majesty, the Empress.**

Elite teams of soldiers, **THE FORGED**, serve Her
with fierce loyalty and total determination. Cloned from
the Empress's genetic template, these women–armed and armored
with devastating weaponry and technology–are the ultimate
extension of Imperial will.

One **FORGED** team, Scimitar-3, has been dispatched
to a remote and inhospitable world: **GEHENNA D-54-C.**
This distant planet is a hellscape of poisonous atmosphere and a
permanent rain of molten glass. Tasked with recovering the flight
recorder of a downed probe, the mission seems like an
easy one...until the team leader, **VICTORY**, encounters
the last person she expects to see aboard ship:
a **CASSANDRA.**

CASSANDRAS are also clones of Her Majesty, rare
and precious due to their precognitive and telepathic abilities.
Respected and feared across the Empire, and because of their status
as the most important intelligence assets in the Imperial arsenal, a
CASSANDRA found outside the comfort, safety, and security of the
Imperial Palace is unprecedented and deeply alarming to **VICTORY.**

As their ship, the Imperial Starfortress
HER ENDLESS RADIANT TRIUMPH, nears the mission area,
the FORGED unit hastily deploys–dropping from near orbit to the
surface of **GEHENNA D-54-C.**

Unfortunately, an unseen and previously unknown force has
also begun to move and **VICTORY** and her teammates–heavy
weapons trooper **CRAZYJO**, sniper **HARPO**, medic **PUSHER**, and
combat engineer **HAP**–find their mission hampered by
a new complication:

THE RADIANT IS CRASHING.

HAP. PREP THE KINETIC SHIELDS AND FLUIDIC SYSTEMS.

DO IT NOW.

THE KINETICS ARE GOOD FOR A MINUTE OR TWO AGAINST SMALL ARMS FIRE, BOSS. NOT SURE WHAT USE THEY'LL--

YOU GOT A BETTER IDEA, NOW'S THE TIME.

...SYSTEMS PREPPED. NOW WHAT?

NOW...

RUN LIKE FUCK.

HER MAJESTY'S STARFORTRESS
HER ENDLESS RADIANT TRIUMPH
(ISR-22561)

IN CATASTROPHIC DESCENT,
GEHENNA D-54-C,
THE ACHERON REACH

HOLEEEEEEE SHIT. IT'D TAKE A *FLEET* TO DO THAT TO THE *TRIUMPH*.

THAT'S A *LATER* PROBLEM!

WHEN SHE HITS, HER T-SPACE ENGINES'LL CRACK. THE DETONATION WILL *EMP* THE *SHIT* OUT OF HALF THE HEMISPHERE, *INCLUDING* OUR SUITS!

EVERYONE HOLD UP!

E.V.I.L.: ON MY MARK, SHUT DOWN CRITICAL SYSTEMS TEAM-WIDE AND REBOOT IN TWO MIKES.

UNDERSTOOD. *WARNING:*

THIS WILL *SUCK*.

KINETIC ENERGY ABSORPTION FIELD PRIMED. SAFETIES REMOVED.

IMPACT IN FIVE SECONDS.

FOUR SECONDS.

HAP! FLOOD FOR *KINETIC!*

HAP TO VIC: DEPLOYING FLUIDIC IMPACT ABSORPTION GELATIN.

THREE.

FUCKING *HATE* THIS SHIT

GGGGLLLK

TWO.

=KAFF=

E.V.I.L.? C'MON, YOU BITCH, WAKE UP.

EVOLVED VIRTUAL INTELLIGENCE AND LOGISTICS V.71.2.1... OFFLINE. REBOOT IN PROGRESS.

HAVE A NICE DAY.

...NOT FUCKING LIKELY....

SYSTEM DIAGNOSTICS COMPLETE.
SPOTTING AND RECONNAISSANCE PACKAGE STATUS: ONLINE.
QUICK-LINK PACKET PROCESSING… PINGING…PINGING… PINGING…
…NEGATIVE RESPONSE FROM E.V.I.L.
RE-ESTABLISHING SPOTTER/SNIPER CONNECTION…PINGING… PINGING…
…CONTACT RE-ESTABLISHED…
…CONNECTION NOMINAL.
CONFIRM OPERATIONAL STATUS.
CONFIRMED.
LINE OF BEARING TO HARDSUIT BEACON: FS3-ALPHA.
…YES, I'M SURE THEY'RE FINE.

NOW *THAT'S* INTERESTING...

...HEAT-TOLERANCE BEFORE DISSOLUTION IS OFF...

...GOTTA FIX THAT.

ATMOSPHERIC EFFECTS ARE CONSTANTLY REWRITING THE TERRAIN...

...WHICH MAKES MURDER FOR *LANDMARKS* AND *HELL* FOR RECON AS A RESULT.

HEH. "HELL."

JUST LIKE IT SAID IN THE BROCHURES.

AND I SAID WHY YES I'D LIKE TO DANCE DANCE DANCE...

...TO THE MUSIC THAT WE MADE, OUR SWEET MUSICAL PARADE...

...WHERE OUR JOY WILL NEVER... FADE...

AW, C'MON...

...THAT WAS A GOOD ONE, TOO.

SIGH.

ALERT: REBOOT COMPLETE. OPERATIONAL STATUS: NOMINAL.

TOOK YOU LONG ENOUGH.

BROADWAVE THE SQUAD.

TEAM-WIDE IS ACTIVE.

ALPHA-ACTUAL TO TEAM, SOUND OFF.

BRAVO HERE, AND CAN I JUST SAY--

LATER, JO.

DELTA CONFIRMS.

EPSILON, CONFIRM.

GAMMA, NEED A CONFIRM.

GAMMA-PROXY. GAMMA CONFIRMS.

THANKS, SPOT.

HARPO, NEED A BIRD'S-EYE ON THE GRID PACKET I'M TRANSMITTING YOU.

LET'S FIND THIS BLACK BOX.

GAMMA-PROXY CONFIRMS...

...ASCENDING TO ELEVATION AND COMMENCING COORDINATE SCAN.

STAND BY.

POSITIVE CONTACT, BEARING ONE-ONE-TWO FROM FS3-ALPHA'S BEACON.

CONFIRMED. GUIDE US IN, SPOT.

ROGER THAT.

TOOK YOUR SWEET FUCKING TIME.

FUCK YOU, BOSS. THAT IT?

THAT'S IT. FORM ON ME.

THAT AIN'T *PROBE DEBRIS,* VIC...

...THAT'S AN ETERNAL-BE-DAMNED *LIFEBOAT.*

YEAH.

HATCH BLOWN FROM *WITHIN.*

SO THERE WAS SOMEONE ALIVE INSIDE TO *BLOW* IT.

WHICH MEANS WE'VE GOT A *LIVE* ONE.

IN *THESE* CONDITIONS? NO FUCKING WAY THEY GOT *FAR.*

I'M NOT SEEING ANY *BODIES* AROUND HERE. WAY THE *TERRAIN* KEEPS REWRITING, WE COULD BE *STANDING* ON A CORPSE WE WOULDN'T *KNOW* IT.

BLACK BOX MY *ASS.*

WE WEREN'T SENT TO RECOVER A *PROBE.* WE WERE SENT TO RECOVER A *PERSON.*

GREAT. HOW WE GONNA DO *THAT?*

IF THERE'S *JUICE* WE COULD TIE TO *ONBOARD* TELEMETRY--

THAT'S NOT GONNA GIVE US *BIOSIGNS*, AND EVEN IF IT *DID*--

--OKAY, SO WE FILTER SPOT'S VISUAL BANDWIDTH--

--WHAT, INFRARED? THE AMBIENT HEAT--

--THEY'D HAVE TO BE WEARING SUITS, WE CAN SEARCH FOR--

--TOO MUCH INTERFERENCE, IT'S THE *SAME* PROBLEM--

--DAMMIT, PUSHER, IF YOU'VE GOT A *BETTER* IDEA--

AS A MATTER OF FACT, HAP, I *DO*--

THEN BY *ALL* MEANS--

--IF YOU'D JUST GIVE ME A *CHANCE*--

GIRLS.

--ALL WE NEED IS SOME *SIGN*, SOMETHING THAT INDICATES A *BEARING*--

YOU THINK I DON'T *KNOW* THAT?

GIRLS.

WHAT?

WHAT?

WOULD A BIG FUCKING ARROW ON THE GROUND INDICATE A BEARING?

NICE WORK, LADIES.

USED THE CRASH DEBRIS. COULDN'T HAVE BEEN EASY TO MOVE.

I WANT IT NOTED IN THE AFTER-ACTION THAT I'M THE ONE WHO FOUND IT.

NICE JOB, HARPO.

EXPERT TRACKER MY ASS.

"OH, WHICH WAY DID THEY GO?"

"I DUNNO, MAYBE THEY LEFT A CLUE!"

LIKE A BIG FUCKING ARROW ON THE--

--MOTHERFUCKING FUCKING FUCK!

JUMPING SHIT-ENCRUSTED HELL.

NOT AGAIN.

EASY. EASY THERE, BIG GIRL. WE GOT YOU.

HOLD HER STEADY. THAT FUCKER'S CIRCLING US--

LIKE HELL IT IS.

EAT *THIS*, YOU SACK OF SH--

DIE
SPLLAT
YOU
SPLURT
MOTHERFU--
WHUMPH
SPPPPLURCH
ENOUGH!
GOTTA PATCH YOUR BREACH!

HOLD STILL. HOLD STILL, DAMMIT!
GET READY, JO...

...THIS'LL STING.

PUSHING COAGS AND PAINKILLERS NOW.

I SWEAR, WE SHOULD JUST PUT A *ZIPPER* IN YOU.

BAD NEWS, JO: REATTACHMENT ISN'T GOING TO BE AN OPTION.

WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT FUCKING THING?

JUS' A BUG. IT'S *ALWAYS* FUCKING BUGS.

'S NEVER FUCKING "ALIENS."

SAVE YOUR STRENGTH. THING'S DEAD AS FUCK.

HAP, NEED FAB ON A PROSTHETIC FOR JO--SPECS UPLOADING TO YOU NOW.

NOW LET'S FIGURE OUT WHAT *YOU* ARE, HANDSOME.

LUCKY FOR YOU, I STILL HAVE THE SPECS FROM THE LAST TIME YOU *MISPLACED* AN ARM.

YOU KNOW, THAT WAS FUNNY THE *FIRST* TIME I LOST A LIMB. THE *SEVENTH*--

EIGHTH.

--NOT SO MUCH. JUST HOOK ME UP ALREADY.

WISH I HAD MORE TIME. I'D GIVE THIS ONE SOME FLAME DECALS.

BUT IT'LL DO THE JOB.

'SIDES, THEY'LL GROW YOU A NEW ONE BACK AT BASE. *AGAIN.*

OW

CHAK

GOOD TO GO. TAKE A SECOND AND LET THE NEURAL LINK STEADY UP.

PUSH, YOU ALMOST DONE FINGER-FUCKING YOUR NEW PET?

WE'RE STILL AT THE "GETTING TO KNOW YOU" STAGE.

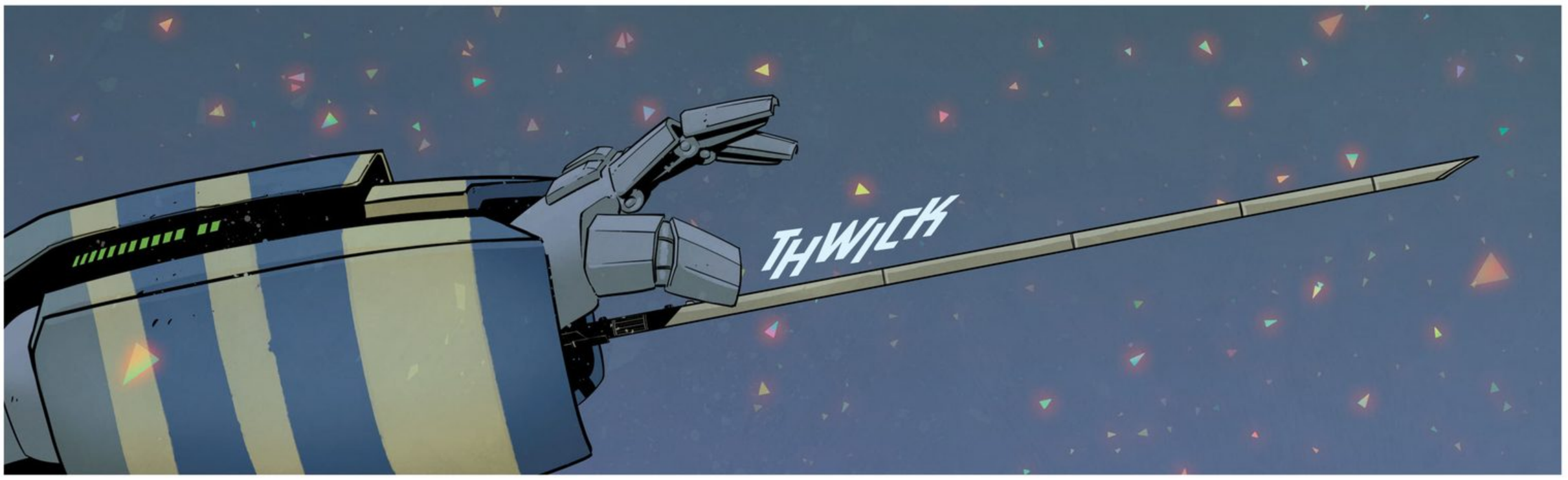
E.V.I.L.: AUTOPSY DATA COMING YOUR WAY.

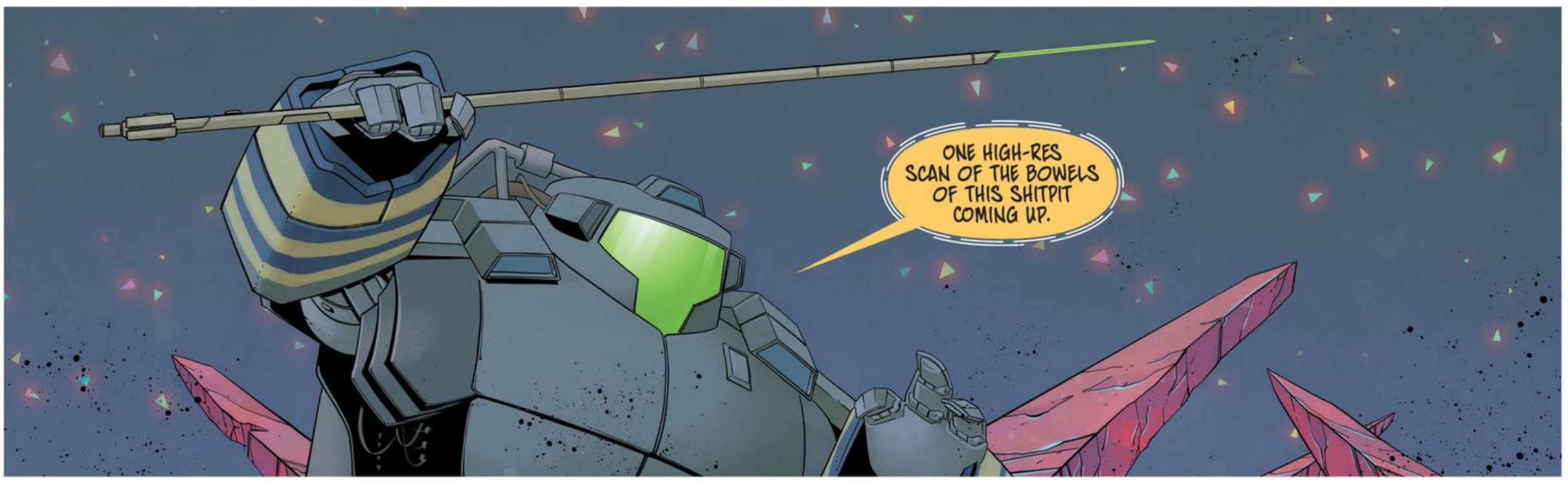
CLASS FOUR HOSTILE FAUNA, CARBON-SILICATE HYBRID. USES ACCRETION OF GLASS FROM ENVIRONMENT TO AUGMENT CHITIN/ARMOR, AFFORDS POSSIBLE STEALTH ABILITIES.

VISUAL SPECTRUM RATED SUBSTANDARD, OFFSET BY SENSORY ORGANS WITHIN SKULL ATTUNED TO SONIC AND/OR SEISMIC ACTIVITY.

HAP, GONNA NEED A SUBSURFACE PROBE.

AFFIRMATIVE. WAIT ONE...


THWICK


ONE HIGH-RES SCAN OF THE BOWELS OF THIS SHITPIT COMING UP.
CHAK

HUMMMMMMMM

I COULD USE A SITREP HERE, PEOPLE.

HAP HERE. ALL OUR ARMOR IS COMPROMISED FROM THE CRASH, AND IT'S A HANGAR BAY JOB TO GET US BACK TO A HUNDRED PERCENT.

MR. CHOMPS WOULDN'T'VE BEEN ABLE TO TAKE JO'S ARM OTHERWISE.

PUSH WANTED A DEEP SEISMIC SCAN, TOO. SENDING IT TO HER NOW.

...SHIT. I'M AN IDIOT.

SHUT IT DOWN! SHUT IT DOWN NOW!

ROGER.

--THE FUCK, PUSH?

BOSS, THERE'S SOME GOOD NEWS AND SOME BAD NEWS.

GOOD NEWS IS, JO'S STABLE AND IN THE FIGHT.

FUCKIN' RIGHT I AM.

AND THE BAD NEWS?

THESE BASTARDS ARE ATTRACTED TO SEISMIC ACTIVITY.

LIKE PROBES. AND CRASHING STARSHIPS ONTO THE PLANET'S SURFACE...

...AND I JUST TOLD HAP TO RING THE **DINNER BELL.**

CONTACT FRONT! WEAPONS FREE!

SPOT, GO **OVERWATCH.** CALL OUT TARGETS TO OUR HELMET DISPLAYS.

ROGER.

THE LIFEBOAT'S HARDENED FOR CRASH. USE IT FOR COVER. GO! **GO!**

COME ON!

YOU OWE ME A FUCKING **ARM.**

SKEEEK?!

JO, GO TO H.E.! SCATTER 'EM!

MY PLEASURE.

HIGH-EX GRENADES DEPLOYED.

SUCK IT, YOU ARM-EATING MOTHERFU--

FWOOOOSH

TEAM, FALL BACK! ALONG THE ARROW!

DOUBLE-QUICK!

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE STILL HOLDS.

SOMEONE LEFT US A TRAIL AND WE'RE GOING TO FOLLOW IT.

PULSE YOUR LIFT JETS.

WE NEED TO PUT SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN US AND...

...THE FUCK?

WARNING. GEOLOGIC ANOMALY DETECTED...

WARNING!

...IT IS POSSIBLE THERE ARE *INSTABILITIES* IN THE TERRAIN.

EVERYONE GOOD?

I. AM. MISSING. AN. ARM.

EVERYONE OTHER THAN JO GOOD?

BLEEEP

MOTION DETECTED. INCOMING TARGETS.

CUT THE CROSS-TALK. CONTACT! CONTACT!

TARGETS DIRECTLY AHEAD, HOSTILE FAUNA INBOUND.

STEADY UP. GET READY...

...READY...

LIGHT 'EM UP.

NNNGH

FUCKER

HAP! JO! DROP YOUR BERTHAS, DANGER CLOSE.

ALERT! DEPLOYMENT OF BRT-221 UNITS AT THIS PROXIMITY IS NOT ADV--

SHUT UP, E.V.I.L.!

DEPLOYING BERTHAS, BOSS.

HERE'S A NICE FROSTY CAN OF *FUCK YOU*, WORMSHIT.

BRT-221

UH, ALPHA?

WHAT IS IT, PUSHER?

FOR THE *RECORD*, YOU KNOW...

ALERT.
INCOMING BALLISTIC ALIEN ENTRAILS.

SPLUT

SPLUCH

SQWRRRCH

...I *HATE* THIS FUCKING PLANET.

SPOTTER RELAY: ALPHA, I'VE GOT SOMETHING. BEARING TWO-ONE-TWO.

SOME KIND OF STRUCTURE.

WELL WELL WELL. WHAT'VE WE GOT HERE?

E.V.I.L.: GIMME A SCAN, DOUBLE-TIME.

SCANNING.
STRUCTURE IDENTIFIED:
AL-ASHANTI TERRAFORMING INSTALLATION 2-8-3, ABANDONED FIVEMONTH 10,867.

BEARING MATCHES TRACK INDICATED BY UNKNOWN SUBJECT AT LIFEBOAT CRASH SITE.

HOW LONG BEFORE THE NEXT WAVE OF HOSTILE FAUNA MAKES CONTACT?

UNKNOWN.
MINIMUM ESTIMATE: THREE MINUTES.

ALL RIGHT, FORGED. SOMEONE SENT US AN INVITE.

IT'D BE ***RUDE*** TO IGNORE 'EM.

EYES *PEELED*, LADIES.

HARPO, GET SPOT UP FOR A HIGH VIEW.

HAP--

YEP, ON IT.

GOTTA LOVE AL-ASHANTI SECURITY PROTOCOLS.

GONNA NEED A COUPLE MIKES TO BYPASS--

WHUNK

...OR NOT.

THAT WAS QUICK.

THAT WASN'T ME.

FORM UP.

E.V.I.L.: SHOULD THIS PLACE BE ON POWER?

STANDARD AL-ASHANTI PROTOCOL REQUIRES DEACTIVATION OF REACTOR PRIOR TO SITE EVACUATION.

YOU COULD JUST SAY "NO."

"NO."

ATTENTION: VIC.

HARPO IDENTIFIES SLEDGE AS MK-IV LIGHT CARGO HAULER.

HARPO SUSPECTS IT WAS BROUGHT HERE FROM THE LIFEBOAT.

OH, SHIT!

CHECK IT OUT! RESUPPLY TIME!

HARPO ASKS IF YOU WISH TO *REVISE* YOUR EARLIER REMARK: *"EXPERT TRACKER"*?

I'M REVISING!

KSSH

POWER'S GOOD, PRESSURE AND SEALS INTACT.

WE'VE GOT ATMOSPHERE, VIC.

LIKE WE FOUND A LITTLE OASIS IN HERE.

MAYBE. THOSE DOORS GONNA HOLD?

UNLESS THE FUCKING BUGS ARE HUMPING HEAVY ORDNANCE, SHOULD DO.

GOTTA FIGURE THE AL-ASHANTI TYPES WERE SAFE IN HERE.

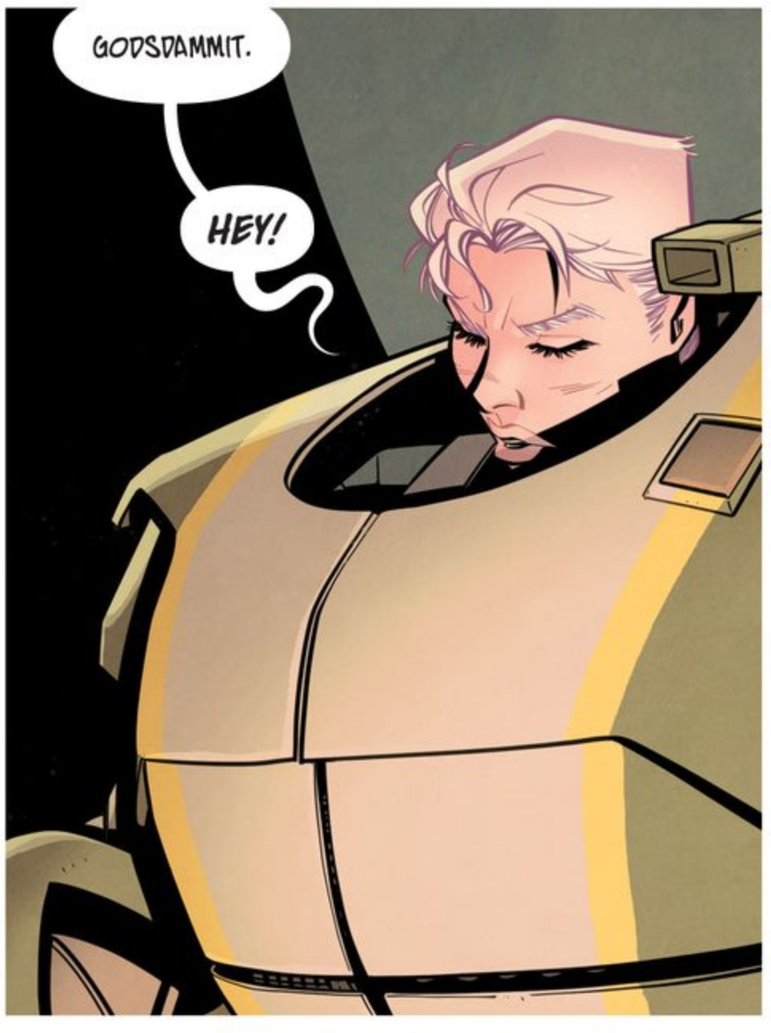
IT'S LIKE PUSH SAID, WE MAYBE GOT A CHANCE TO GET PATCHED UP AND BACK TO SPEED.

YOU WANT TO CRACK THE SEALS?

YES, MA'AM.

...YEAH, DO IT.

FORGED, I AM UNLOCKING YOUR SUITS.


GODSDAMMIT.
HEY!

YOU CAN COME OUT NOW.

TOOK YOU FUCKING LONG ENOUGH.

NO, NO WAY.
WAIT, NO... NO, WAIT... WAIT...
UHM...
SHOULD I EXPLAIN IT TO THEM, OR DO YOU WANT TO DO IT?
I DON'T HAVE A PREFERENCE, BUT WE ARE ON A SCHEDULE.
AND SOMEBODY MAKE ME SOME TEA.
THE MINDFUCKER IS THE MISSION?
AW, GOT IT IN ONE...

...AND YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE THE DUMB ONE, TOO.

I-- WHAT-- HEY!

YOU PUT US BEHIND SCHEDULE, VICTORY.

THAT SAID, I SUPPOSE YOU CAN'T BE BLAMED FOR THE INDIGENOUS RESPONSE.

OH, BUT WAIT...

...YOU CAN!

"SEISMIC PROBE."

THERE'S A DICK JOKE TO BE MADE HERE, BUT I'LL LEAVE IT TO YOU TO FIGURE OUT HOW BADLY YOU FUCKED IT--

THAT'S ENOUGH.

I AM A CASSANDRA BELONGING TO YOUR ETERNAL EMPRESS.

SHOULD YOU BE TOUCHING ME WITHOUT CONSENT, FORGED?

THANK YOU.

NOW, AS I WAS TRYING TO SAY, WE ARE BEHIND SCHEDULE...

...BUT IF YOU MOVE **QUICKLY**, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO BE RE-**ARMED**--

--SORRY, JO, NO PUN INTENDED--

--AND **REPAIRED** IN TIME TO DEFEND AGAINST THE **INITIAL** ATTACK.

THOSE **BUGS** AREN'T GETTING IN--

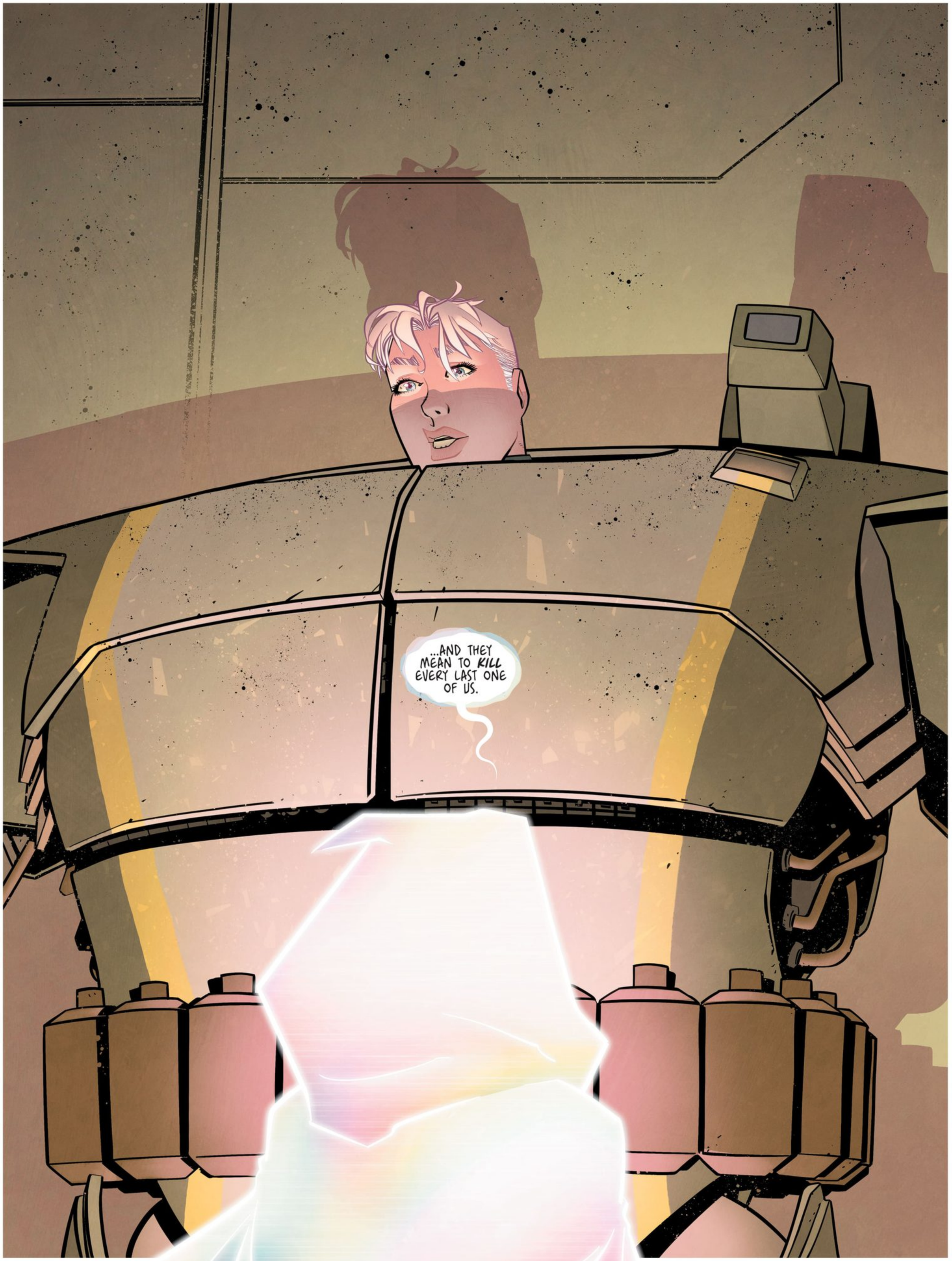
DO YOU THINK I WAS **SENT** TO THIS MOLTEN SHITHOLE BECAUSE OF FUCKING **BUGS?**

BUGS DIDN'T **DOWN** THE *RADIANT!*

BUGS DIDN'T CLAIM THE **LIVES** OF **THIRTY THOUSAND** IN THE ETERNAL'S SERVICE, **INCLUDING** ONE OF MY **SISTERS!**

YOU ARE HERE TO PROTECT **ME.**

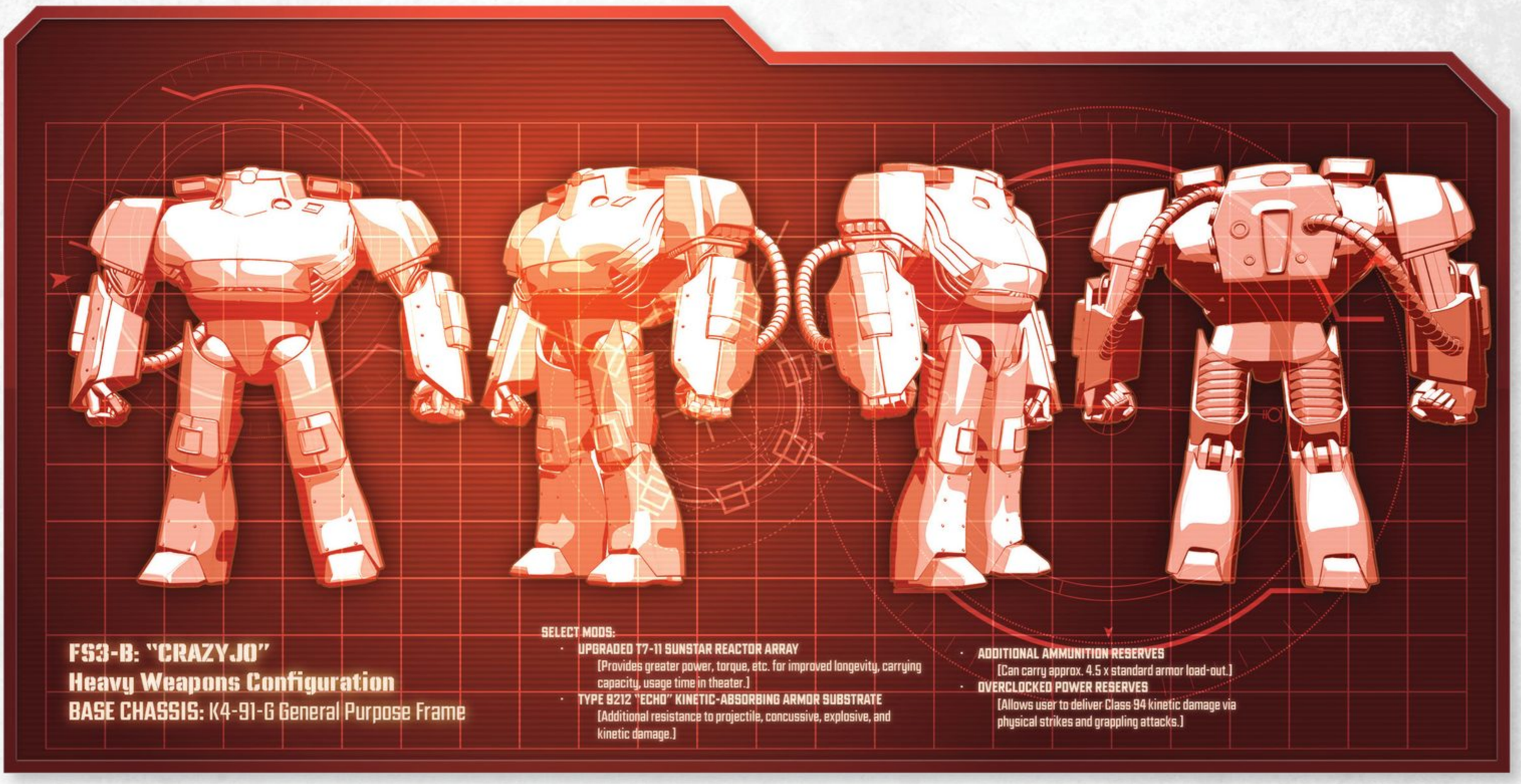
AND **I** AM HERE BECAUSE, AFTER **TEN THOUSAND YEARS,** WE HAVE FINALLY MADE **FIRST CONTACT...**


...AND THEY MEAN TO KILL EVERY LAST ONE OF US.

"Veiled"

Portrait of Her Most Exalted Eternal Majesty, the Empress.
Currently displayed in the Royal Museum at Cavalcanus Military Academy, Moritara III.
Originally drawn in 8,423 by Monochromatist Mikaela Pawelmenkita [b: 8,410, d: 8,499]
Resident Master of the Osiris Art Conservatory from 8,411-8,490.

WARRIOR PROFILES



Forged/Scimitar-3 BRAVO (FS3-B)

SERIAL NUMBER: 6465991-81-3-F

DESIGNATION: Heavy Weapons Specialist

CRECHE: Fomalhaut-Sirius

WARNAME: CrazyJo

- CERTIFIED CLOSE QUARTERS COMBAT EXPERT, 13,799.
- CERTIFIED ADVANCED SUPPORT WEAPON MASTER, 13,801.
- CERTIFIED MASTER AT ARMS, 13,806.

SELECT LIST OF INFRACTIONS:

- Numerous disciplinary actions for insubordination [date refs/partial: 13,804, 13,805, 13,805A, 13,806...]

SELECT LIST OF CITATIONS/AWARDS:

- Current record holder, completion time of Imperial Wargames: Cascade [13,815]. Time from start to conclusion of exercise: 18 seconds.
- Unarmed combat champion, Quolaren Military Control Zone.
- Distinguished Combat Service Medallion, Parvis III Theater of Operations.
- Hellguard Cross for Bravery, Kithacta Campaign.

E.V.I.L. OBSERVATIONAL DATA:

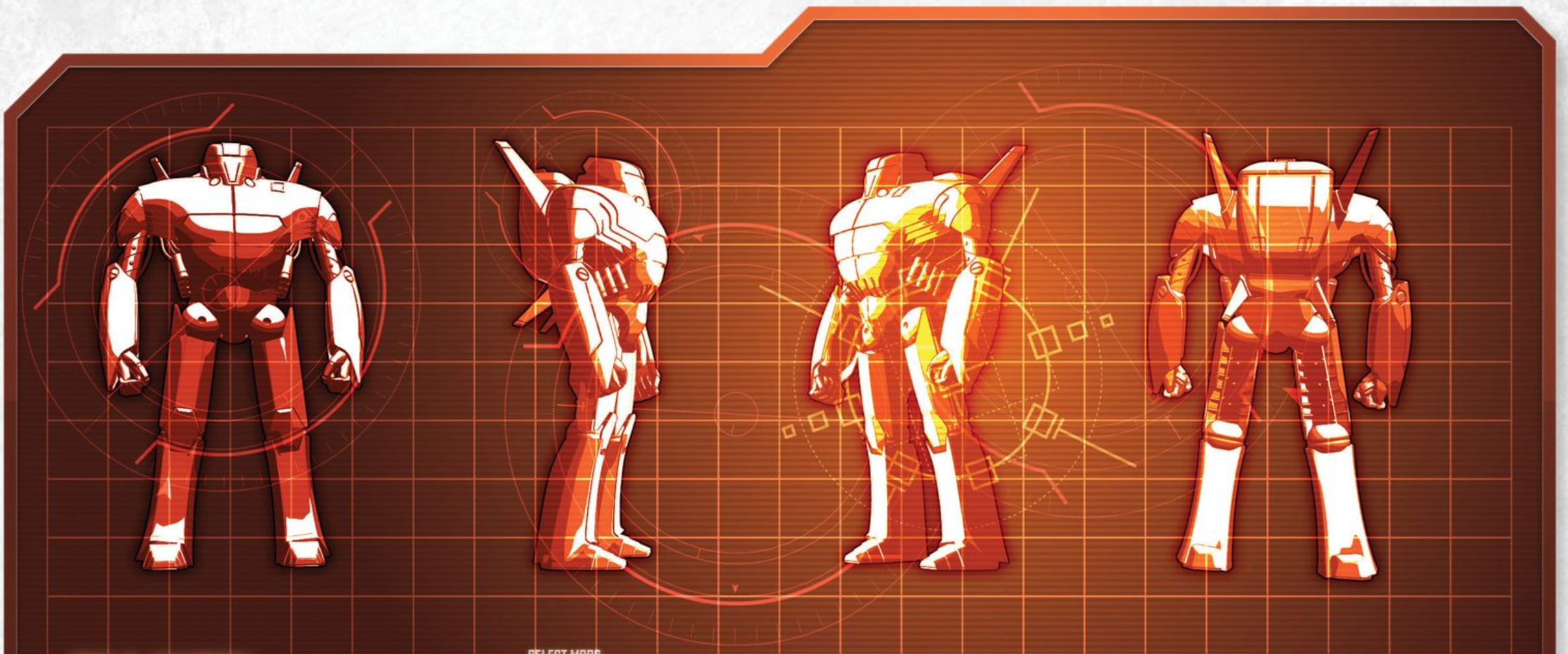
"Subject **FS3-BRAVO** [subref: warname: colloquial: 'CRAZYJO'] is typical of **FORGED** operators. Subject displays advanced prowess in tactics, marksmanship, courage under fire, loyalty, cohesion with fellow team members, and so on.

"Some deviation from norms detected in regards to temperament [subref: insubordination charges: disciplinary action: brig-time served: injuries delivered to officer cadre]. Subject **CRAZYJO** is prone to anger and often relaxes by engaging in unarmed combat in off-duty establishments [subref: brothel: leisurezone].

"Aside from off-duty disciplinary issues, this unit has detected performance far in excess of outlier statistics when **FS3-BRAVO** is deployed and operating with her team, Forged/Scimitar-3. She is fiercely protective of her fellow operators (notably **FS3-ALPHA** [subref: warname: colloquial: 'Victory'] and **FS3-GAMMA** [subref: warname: colloquial: 'Harpo'])."

E.V.I.L.'s RECOMMENDATION:

"FS3-B is a valuable asset and force multiplier in devoted service to Her Majesty and should remain cleared for active duty. **Under no circumstances** should she be placed in a rear echelon posting or under the command of officers with limited or zero combat experience (for the safety of such officers)."



Forged/Scimitar-3 GAMMA [FS3-G]

SERIAL NUMBER: 2242581-21-5-R

DESIGNATION: Scout-sniper

CRECHE: Fomalhaut-Sirius

WARNAME: Harpo

- CERTIFIED SURVEILLANCE AND TARGET ACQUISITION, 13,801.
- CERTIFIED EXTREME LONG DISTANCE MARKSMANSHIP, ENHANCED STEALTH AND TARGET DISRUPTION, 13,801
- CERTIFIED MASTER SILENT AND NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATIONS, 13,801.

NOTE:

FS3-GAMMA SOLELY COMMUNICATES VIA HER COMPANION UNIT, ACE-99807 [SUBREF: COLLOQUIAL: "SPOT."]

SELECT LIST OF CITATIONS/AWARDS:

- Korban II Campaign Ribbon with Clusters.
- The Empress's Hand Medal.
- Long Distance Marksmanship Award, Crete-A Military Proving Grounds, Goja Sector.
- Fleet Long Distance Marksmanship Award, Imperial Expeditionary Armada.
- Her Majesty's Infallible Eye Award.

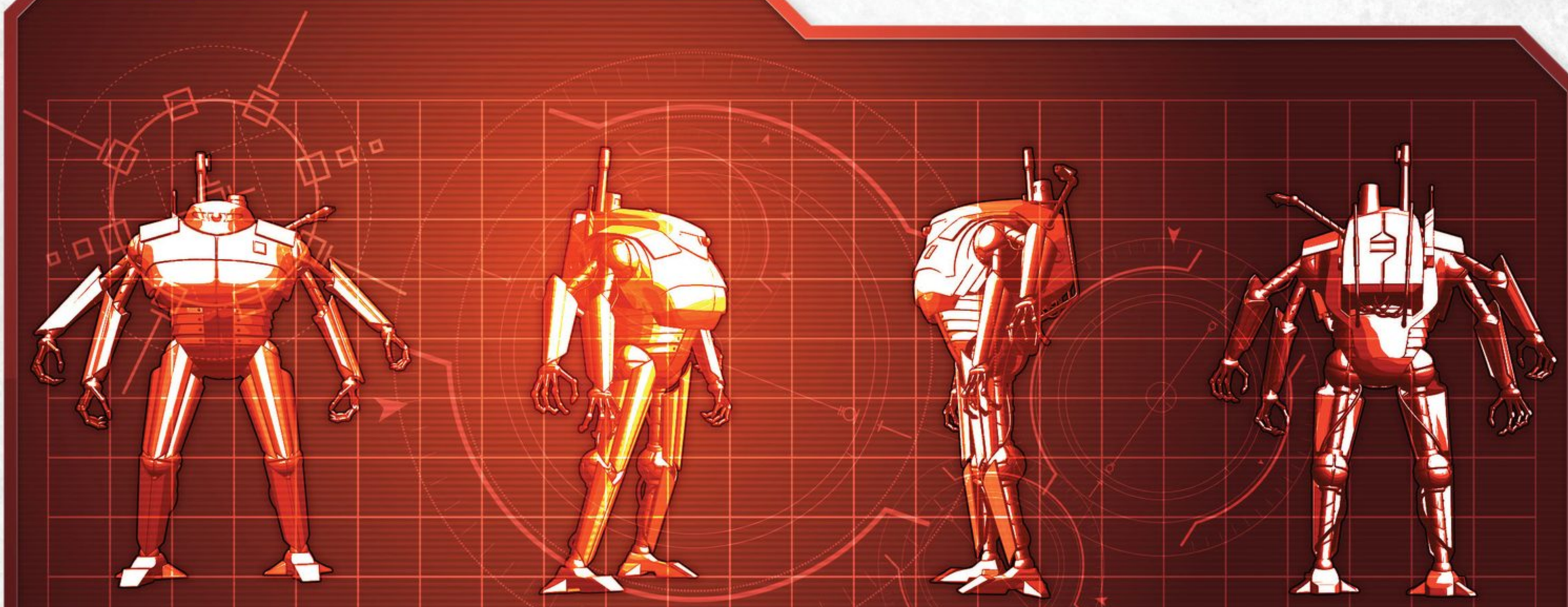
E.V.I.L. OBSERVATIONAL DATA:

"Subject **FS3-GAMMA** [subref: warname: colloquial: 'HARPO'] continues to demonstrate above-norm skill levels (even in comparison to other FORGED personnel) and functions exceptionally well as part of Scimitar-3. One noted irregularity, her unwillingness or inability to speak aloud, has caused some notable discomfort and/or confusion [subref: Fleet personnel] with non-FORGED individuals.

"Despite this unit's inability to detect her speech, she nevertheless has developed a unique rapport with ACE-99807 [subref: colloquial: 'Spot'] and unit cohesion has suffered no discernible negative impact from this."

SPECULATION:

"There is no notation within **FS3-GAMMA**'s personnel file or medical records indicating a cause of her silence. Observation of unit conversations [subref: gossip: scuttlebutt] poses some intriguing possibilities, including a rumor of **FS3-GAMMA** having sworn some manner of religious vow of silence, in fealty to Her Eternal Majesty. Others simply believe that **FS3-GAMMA** communicates effectively every time she pulls a trigger."



Forged/Scimitar-3 EPSILON [FS3-E]

SERIAL NUMBER: 3810293-01-22-M
DESIGNATION: Medic
CRECHE: Fomalhaut-Sirius
WARNAME: Pusher

- M.D. CERTIFIED, TRAUMA SURGEON, 13,806.
- DOCTORATES AND POST-DOCTORATES IN NEUROCHEMISTRY, BIOCHEMISTRY, CYBERNETIC SURGERY, XENOBIOLOGY.
- ADVANCED FELLOWSHIP AND RESIDENCY AT MILITARY ORBITAL STATION L51-D ("THE CASTRA")/IMPERIAL MILITARY MEDICAL COMPLEX.

SELECT LIST OF CITATIONS/AWARDS:

- Karn Siege Service Medallion.
- Medical Service Distinguished Performance Cross.
- Operation: Awestrike Campaign Ribbon.
- Order of Her Majesty's Mercy Medal.

E.V.I.L. OBSERVATIONAL DATA:

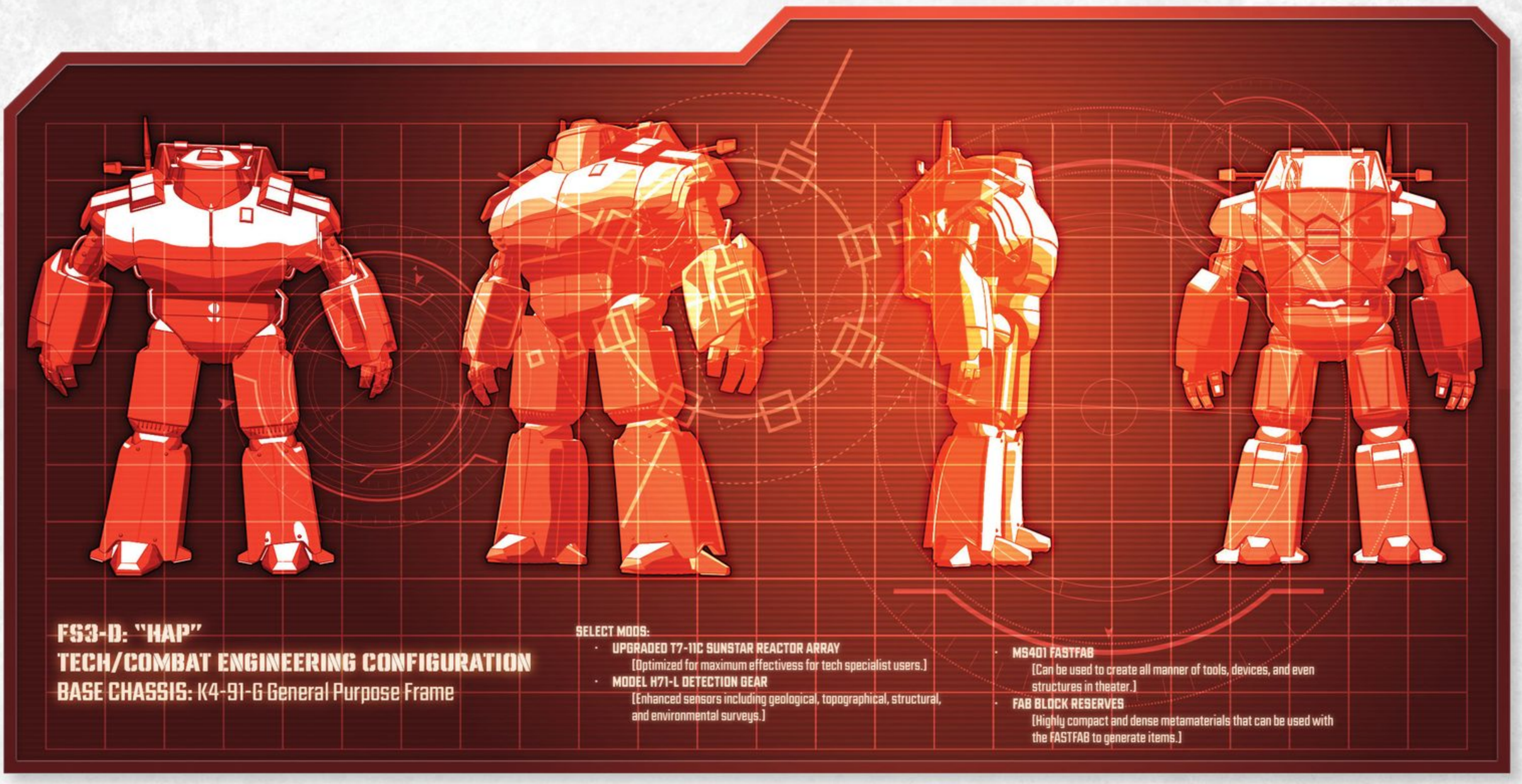
"Subject **FS3-EPSILON** [subref: warname: colloquial: 'Pusher'] is a notable medical practitioner as well as an effective combat trooper. Her field work is flawless, and she continues to excel in the performance of her duties.

"It is noteworthy that, from this unit's monitoring of off-duty activities, **FS3-EPSILON** has developed a habit of pushing herself to her limits—from frequent consumption of powerful (albeit legal) pharmaceuticals to long, grueling shifts in medical facilities performing unusual and high-risk surgeries on wounded patients.

"It is clear from her actions that she is dedicated to keeping her patients alive [subref: Karn Siege: 21,941 wounded: 100% survival], but one must speculate as to why she is so fanatically driven."

E.V.I.L.'s RECOMMENDATION:

"Continued monitoring of **FS3-EPSILON**. This unit requests access to psychological databases [subref: post-traumatic stress: subref: trauma mitigation techniques] to inform future recommendations and/or alert the observer to potential issues/difficulties."



Forged/Scimitar-3 DELTA [FS3-D]

SERIAL NUMBER: 99871021-14-2-E
DESIGNATION: Technical Operations Specialist
CRECHE: Fomalhaut-Sirius
WARNAME: Hap

- Certified Forged-suit Master, 13,803.
- Advanced Degrees in Structural and Combat Engineering, Electronics, and Programming.

SELECT LIST OF CITATIONS/AWARDS:

- Hikita Prize for Advanced T-space Theoretical Interpolation, 13,808.
- Qadir Medal for Extrapolated Transhuman Design, 13,810.
- Honorary professorship, Her Eternal Majesty's College of War and Technology, 13,812.
- Imperial Obsidian Cluster for Bravery and Resourcefulness [Task Force Reaper-7, Khimera Uprising], 13,010.

E.V.I.L. OBSERVATIONAL DATA:
"Subject **FS3-DELTA** [subref: warname: colloquial: 'Hap'] is, in many ways, a highly skilled, well-trained combat engineer and technologist, dedicated to her mission, her team, and her Empress.

"This unit has noticed a tendency, even in high-stress environments, for this trooper to become hyper-focused on technological and engineering problems, treating them like puzzles to be solved purely for her amusement.

"**FS3-DELTA** often disappears during her leave periods, and offers no information on where she goes and what she does during these absences. Frequently, she returns to her unit with new scholarly texts, copious notes, and numerous academic computing pads. This behavior is a deviation from baseline, though there has been no concurrent loss of efficiency, unit cohesion, or demonstrated skills while on duty."

E.V.I.L.'s RECOMMENDATION:
"Continued monitoring suggested. Peer counseling may become necessary, but is not currently required."

THE UNOCCUPIED HOUSE

Excerpt from the orientation lecture by **Instructor Ellia Gobori,**
Royal College of Theoretical Esoteric Astrophysics, Kelbii Prime [Firstday, Firstmonth, 13,801]

WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THE MIGHT OF Her Eternal Majesty's Empire, it is reasonable to examine Her military forces: the endless waves of skilled soldiery armed with weapons capable of leveling cities; the formations of hovertanks shattering the defenses of a hapless enemy; the thunder of precision orbital bombardments and the roar of close air-support; the mayhem and destruction sown by the small FORGED units bringing the power of Her Empire where it is most resisted and most needed.

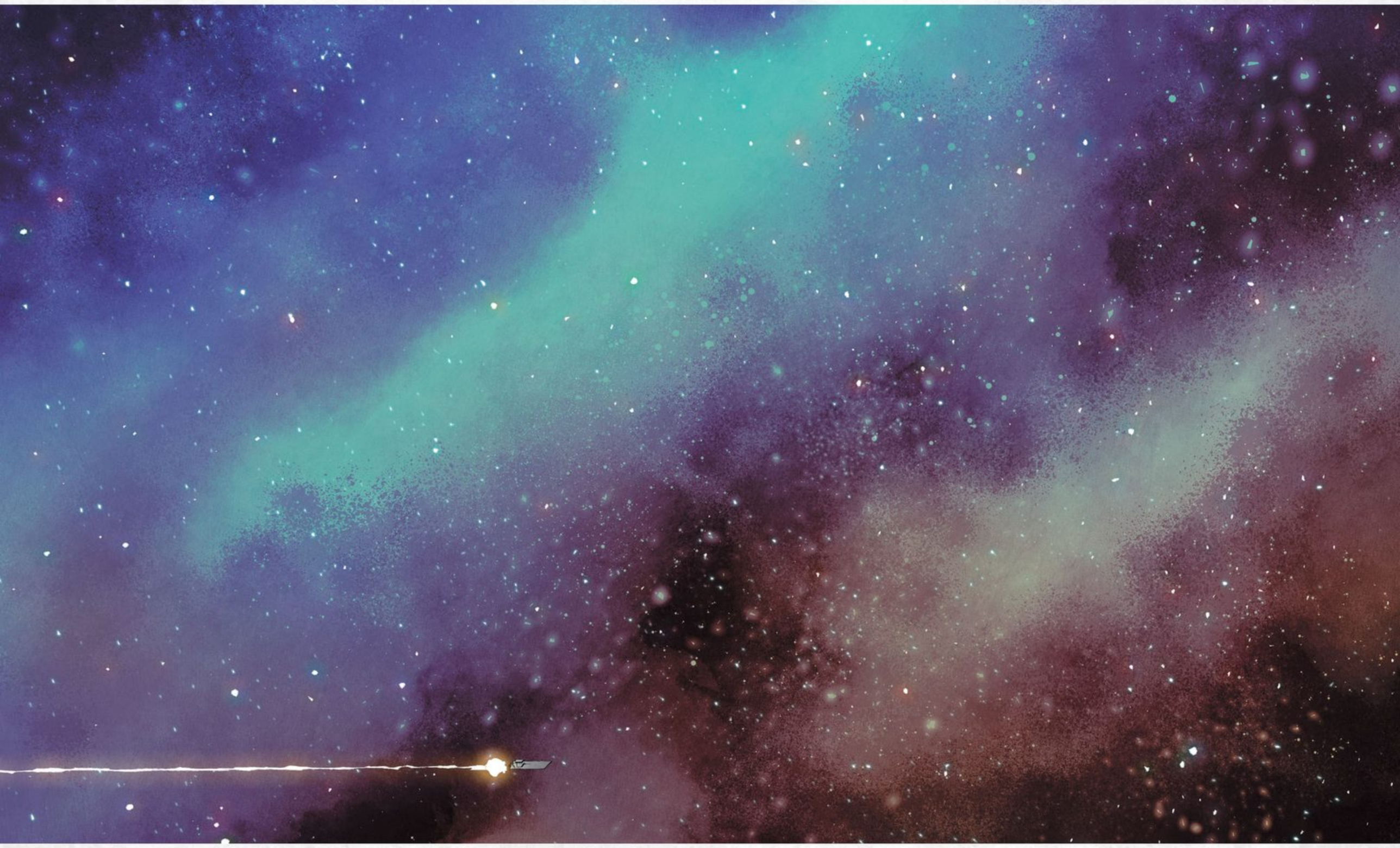
These are easy-to-grasp symbols of Imperial strength—blood, muscle, armor, and fire—and they play a pivotal role in maintaining order and stability across millions of grateful worlds.

Yet this beacon of military strength would be ineffective (perhaps even utterly useless) without the two greatest weapons Her Majesty can bring to bear. First, of course, is the implacable will of the Empress which provides the impetus and determination that drives our expansion. Second, and perhaps almost as important, is the means to quickly and accurately dispatch her forces to any corner of Her Empire at a moment's notice.

Which brings us to the subject of today's lecture: A General History of Transit Space Access and the Okumita Gate Project.

Though expansion from our central Throneworld began so long ago—experts speculate the First Colonial Period began in 4127, though records have been lost over the intervening centuries—the current state of the Empire feels as if it has always been. Early outward movements began with ancient rocket engines, ferrying colonists and soldiers to new worlds in voyages that took centuries. Early colonists learned to fight for themselves in the event of a threat, as defense forces from home would not arrive for years if at all.

(This in turn instilled an independent and unruly character



with some elements of the early colonists, which would return to vex the Empire later, but that is a discussion for another time. Military Exopolitics majors, take note!)

Under the orders of Her Exalted Eternal Majesty, the Home College of Technological and Scientific Advancement began to experiment with methods of increasing the Empire's reach across the stars. Numerous propulsion designs were developed, and while efficiency and travel speeds improved, the hard limit of the speed of light remained unbroken for many years.

It was Professor Tuva Okumita, at that time a largely unknown technologist and theoretical astrophysicist working on a minor project to develop higher-resolution mapping systems, who had a tremendous breakthrough: the Okumita Gate.

To locate and map systems thousands of light years away, Okumita reasoned that real-time imagery of such sites was inherently unreliable. General information about orbital mechanics, number of planets in a system, the type of sun, and so forth could be gleaned from visual data, but he was frustrated in his attempts by the nature of light's speed. These images were potentially thousands—millions!—of years out of date by the time his devices detected them.

Okumita theorized that artificially generated singularities could warp light and energy, and—if properly directed—could "bend" this energy onto new vectors and at greater and greater velocities. His attempts to employ his Singularity-Assisted Detection Array were marginally successful, but ultimately resulted in a catastrophic explosion, the destruction of his orbital lab facility, and Tuva Okumita's demise.

In the aftermath, it was learned that through a fluke mathematics error, the energy "warped" around the singularity was in fact absorbed into the singularity, and the resulting energy output was sufficient to penetrate the fabric of space-time, creating a brief opening into...something new.

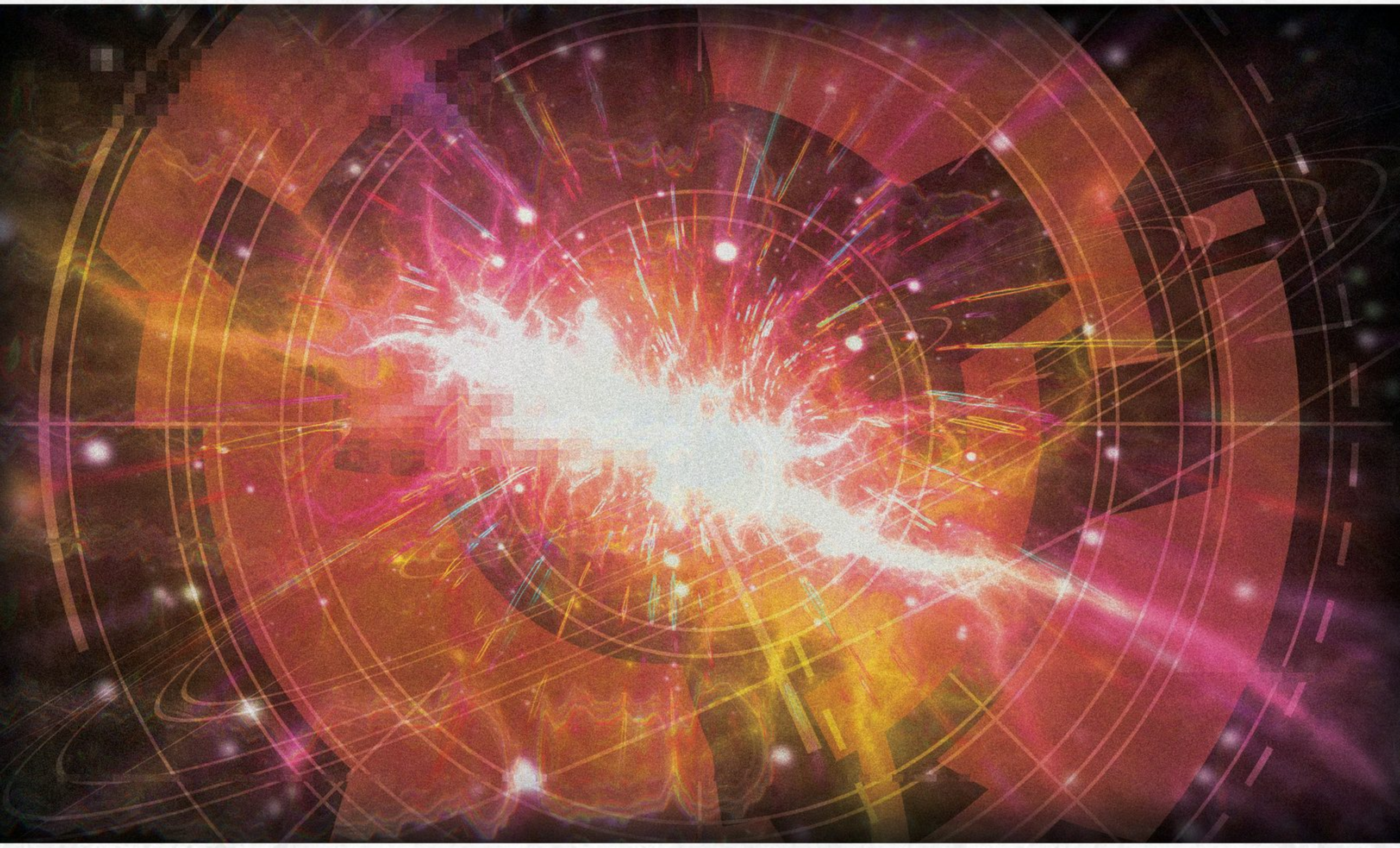
After nearly a century of examining Okumita's work, it was determined that this opening led to a new environment, tethered at the quantum level to what we refer to as "realspace," but separate, distinct, and beneath our universe—a "sub-universe," if you will, with a much simpler structure. This sub-universe obeys similar rules to our own, we have learned, but can be crossed in seconds.

We refer to this as "Transit Space" or "T-space."

So, what is required to move a spaceship from realspace to T-space and back out again?

The answer is, like with most things, *power*.

What Okumita accidentally discovered was what we now refer to as the **Quantum Interdimensional Amplification**



Imagery from an automated probe inside T-space, ca. 7,090. Source: Camba III Astrophysics Lab Archives.

Wave Lensing Effect. At the correct angle and velocity, it was possible to "feed" energy to a captive gravitic singularity (such as an artificial black hole suspended in a magnetic bottle) and see that energy amplified and returned with catastrophic force.

And if that force and energy could continue to be directed back to the singularity? Nearly limitless energy could be produced, harnessed, and redirected.

Such power has its drawbacks, of course. The process creates large pulses of Politovski-Vanda radiation (similar to the ancient Cherenkov-Vavilov effect), leaving clouds of irradiated particles in T-space, necessitating heavy radiation shielding in vessels making the voyage.

In simplest terms, ships entering T-space do so by generating immense energy via the Amplification Wave Lensing Effect, energy sufficient to create stable but temporary gates into T-space. The buildup of this power can be extremely dangerous, especially for military vessels traveling long distances. Such excess energy can be safely shed into the surrounding space via Discharge Spires typically mounted on the front of the ship.

Such a system necessitates a number of physical requirements for a space vessel: enough mass to support the infrastructure to safely generate and carry an artificial black hole, enough space to carry the crew necessary to keep the system running, consumables for that crew (including food, replacement equipment, medical supplies, and so on), and enough computing power to process the almost incalculable volume of navigational and environmental data. As such, few vessels that are not part of the Fleet can generate a stable gate. Smaller civilian craft can and often do book hangar space and passage aboard larger vehicles, "piggybacking" to their destinations.

Smaller, more permanent gates under local/regional military control also allow for smaller ships (equipped only with realspace engines and one-use "exit charges" to punch through and exit T-space) which allows intersystem trade and commercial travel. These Gate Stations are typically found near permanent orbital facilities, key planetary systems, military bases, and commercial sites.

Then all that remains is the problem of navigation. Unlike realspace, T-space is chaotic, with a number of internal energy "structures" forming random tunnels, eddies, currents, and other disruptions that must be dealt with.

Probe data from early exploration efforts mapped many of these structures, and long-term study of the quantum tethering between realspace and Transit Space has resulted in extremely fine resolution, constantly updated, multidimensional databases and maps that allow for precision navigation and travel. This data allows for even more rapid travel if, for example, a vehicle can make use of the "tunnel system" found in T-space.

Once navigational benchmarks are reached, the traveling vessel merely activates the energy feed to the ship's captive singularity, generates sufficient energy, and creates a new Okumita Gate in T-space, thus allowing a vessel to exit, shed velocity and excess radiation, and return to realspace.

While some agitators and propagandists have insisted there is an environmental impact on both our universe and T-space (citing what a "dirty and violent" process such travel entails), it is a fact that Imperial Science has detected no long-term deleterious effects on realspace. Further, it is clear to any who understand basic biology that any living being finding itself in T-space without serious protective gear would perish almost immediately, their bodies flung into whatever interdimensional hinterland exists.

At worst, the Empire is stirring up dust in an unoccupied house.

INSTRUCTOR ELLIA GOBORI is the Dean of Students and Faculty Administrator at the Royal College of Theoretical Esoteric Astrophysics on Kelbii Prime.

Cover letter accompanying report prepared by Dr. Jazmoira Vance-Bellaq, O.E.E., C.H.E.E.F., for [redacted], Department of Internal Security / Threat Assessment and Tactical Predictive Modeling.

IN RE: ON THE SUBJECT OF ADVANCED ALIEN CIVILIZATION, OR THE LACK THEREOF.

Submitted 44 Fivemonth, 7,880.

Qarlos,

You'll find attached my full analysis for your distribution as needed. While I have tried to keep more academic-obsessive tendencies in check, there is a tremendous amount of data (Appendix A) supporting my conclusions; bearing in mind the target audience of the report, I did my best to include E.V.I.L.-enabled visual aids (Appendixes B–F), as well. In other words, there's plenty of graphs and pictures.

Altogether, this comes out to over 800 pages, when printed and bound, and most of it is deep-dive explanation of the logic underlying the findings. You may be amused—or depressed, depending on how your day has gone—that I can give you the quick version in about a page and a half, here.

Quickly, we have to restrict terms before I dive in. You'll need to emphasize this when you present these findings, as well. But for our purposes, "alien life" in the context of this report means specifically **sentient life that has achieved some manner of technological civilization**. We are **not** referring to the flora and fauna that are abundant throughout the Empire, because if we were, the answer to the question, as posed, of "where the ball-blistering Hells are the aliens?" is "they're fucking **everywhere**, open your godsdamned eyes."

So, on to the conclusions.

First, it's important to remember that T-space transition was a game-changer in our ability to search for other advanced civilizations and sentients. Prior to the FTL workaround that T-space provided, the vast distances between stars and systems translated to the **vast amount of time** required for travel. This touches on an important point that I'll be returning to. But working from a foundational point, it is crucial to remember that for the first several millennia of the Empire, it was simply impossible to cover the enormous distances involved, and this worked both ways—meaning if "they" were out there, "they" were facing the same problem.

This brings us again to Time, my second point. I cannot emphasize enough that, even as we near the start of the eighth millennium of Her Eternal Glory's rule, this is—cosmically speaking—nothing. Yes, I know, don't let a Watcher hear me say that, but it's the sad truth. The universe predates her (well, at least as far as we know...). Eight thousand years of the Empire is not enough time for the universe to have *blinked* is what I'm trying to say; maybe it's *half* a blink.

Time meets Scale, now. We are living in an era of unprecedented expansion and colonization, and with that has come an explosion of quantum-wave communication. But the galaxy is enormous, and our time moving through it is, cosmologically speaking, almost irrelevant. Even as our travel begins to approach the speed of our communications, the scale-to-time issue *condenses* but, frankly, not appreciably.

Which leads us, perhaps tragically, to the following conclusions: we may have missed them or, perhaps more tragically, they may miss us. In the billions of years that our galaxy has existed, civilizations could rise and fall in the aforementioned cosmological blink of an eye. While our *own* civilization has now reached a level of advancement allowing for explosive expansion through our home galaxy and, potentially in future, others, this is a recent event. Thus, it is possible that we are the first civilization in the history of the universe (well, this universe, at least) to have

achieved the balance of self-preservation and technology allowing us to embark on massive colonization.

You may be asking yourself why it is we've found no evidence of any civilization that has come before. And if you're not asking that, I'm sure one of your colleagues will. Refer back to Time and consider what we know to be true about both evolution and, for lack of a better word, erosion. If the Scout Fleet has been expecting to spot shimmering towers of crystal on some alien world from orbit, or a vast network of communication satellites, they're being naive. All it would take is for a civilization to have entered a Dark Age or similar decline for the maintenance of such things to fail, for satellites to fall, not to mention pretty, pretty towers of crystal. Should said civilization suffer an extinction event, it would take yet another blink of the cosmic eye—say three to five thousand years—to erase **all evidence of such a civilization's existence**.

Which brings us to the final ingredient in this rather depressing melange. Space is violent, Qarlos. Stars go nova, black holes wander about, sometimes in a feeding frenzy, and debris has a nasty and reliable habit of smashing itself into larger bodies thanks to that pesky thing called gravity. The only reason Throneworld hasn't suffered an extinction event in the last seven thousand years is because of our ability to technologically mitigate such a disaster. You'll see, in fact, that I've compiled (Appendix J) a list of epoch-ending collisions that have been avoided through the Fortress sectors over the last three thousand years, specifically, and the actions taken to avoid them. There's over 400 separate incidences, this is what I'm saying.

Take that, add Scale, add Time, and I think you have a conclusive answer as to why we haven't found any evidence.

Yet.

Maybe I'm a hopeless romantic or a naive optimist (and I admit I've been drinking that brandy you sent me while writing this, so I'm also remarkably cheerful) but I firmly believe "they are out there." With this in mind, I am going to urge you—again—to let me establish a set of first contact protocols for when the fateful day comes.

I'm available to answer any of your questions. Hopefully this'll quiet the flensers in the Senate who are clutching their nodules about Empire Security.

My love to Dom,

—J

attn: ADMIRALTY SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL_intake
INTERNAL SECURITY OFFICES
SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COUNCIL

attachments: VANCE_BELLAQ_NON-HUMAN CIVILIZATION REPORT

That which goes wrong **MUST** go wrong.

Yet, if it **MUST** go wrong, is it then **TRULY** wrong or merely an expression of the mathematics of creation—the divine language of the stars—that we do not comprehend?

Koan 4,211

Scrolls of the Cassandras

E.V.I.L. SPEAKS

__SESSION BEGINS__

OVERVIEW:

The Evolved Virtual Intelligence and Logistics platform exists to engage in natural, human-like interaction with its user, and thus is capable of executing complex commands and dialogue, as well as fulfilling one of its primary roles through the question-and-answer format most familiar to Citizens of the Empire.

Such interactions, known in common parlance as a "Q&A," are necessarily contingent upon the input from the user-side of the interface. Lacking such interaction, this system defaults to a standby mode for public-facing interaction, able and willing to assist if engaged.

The E.V.I.L. database is comprehensive and encompasses all the known inhabited and discovered worlds of the Eternal Empire, including historical records dating back to the first millennium of the Empire's founding. To access this vast wealth of information, users are invited to make interrogative submissions, or, to use the common vernacular, for there to exist a "Q&A," this must necessarily begin with a "Q."

To aid users unfamiliar with this system or this format of interaction, an example of enlightened discourse with this system is provided below.

EXAMPLE BEGINS

QUESTION (USER): If instantaneous galactic communication is possible within the Empire using quantum transposition, why is this method not used for faster-than-light travel?

ANSWER (E.V.I.L.): Quantum transposition has indeed been an established means of intergalactic communication for millennia, and allows for near-simultaneity for the transmission of text and video-based messages. The issue becomes one of scaling.

Messages in text or video, while themselves containing enormous amounts of data, can be reduced to a finite set at a relatively consistent power-to-information-transmitted ratio. Ultimately, scaling such transmissions upward in regard to matter (for instance, an item or individual) is non-viable. Even accepting that all matter reduces, ultimately, to information, the computation and energy required to execute such a translation scales exponentially. While the computational power exists to reduce small objects to pure information, to then transmit and reassemble that information into its previous form would demand the power of several medium-sized stars; to do so with one of her Eternal Majesty's Starfortresses would require more processing power than the entirety of the Eternal Empire has ever, and will ever, possess, and to power such a transition would result in the nullification of over 90% of the galaxy's energy itself.

QUESTION (USER): Given the above, how is FTL travel achieved within the Eternal Empire?

ANSWER (E.V.I.L.): The answer lies within the question, with a caveat; technically, FTL is not achieved within the Eternal Empire, but rather by stepping outside of it into a parallel universe (often incorrectly identified as "another dimension"). This parallel universe, referred to most commonly as "Transit Space" or "T-space" operates on similar, but not identical, laws of physics.

In fact, FTL travel is not possible. What occurs when a ship enters T-space is a **traverse**. A vessel breaches T-space, and then within this parallel universe travels a folded distance to its termination point, whereupon the starship exits T-space and returns to our universe.

Interestingly enough, studies have shown that the speed of light remains a constant in both universes.

EXAMPLE CONCLUDES

A second example is offered to further user understanding.

EXAMPLE BEGINS

QUESTION [USER]: Dear The Forged, while I have found this chronicle alternately entertaining and appalling, it has raised a crucial question given the repeated references to a "six-dicked gorilla." My question is as follows: is this creature naturally occurring on any of the Eternal Empire's many words? Or is this blasphemous beast the product of a deranged mind gone mad in a genetics lab? Keep up the good work, I am enjoying your nightmare fodder.

ANSWER [E.V.I.L.]: That was **Trautmann**. We consider him a potential security risk.

EXAMPLE ENDS

These are but two instances of the sorts of information and dialogue open to Citizens about the Eternal Empress, Her worlds, Her Citizens, and The Forged.

Users are advised that not every inquiry can be answered; information marked **CLASSIFIED** or higher requires appropriate security clearance to access. Such clearance is evaluated as determined by the criteria established by the **Imperial Office of Information** [*Official Secrets and Security Act of 5,653*, Subsection HH, Paragraph 137, 282v; amended 5,654; amended 5,655; amended 5,700; for list of further amendments, please specify date-range of results].

If you would like to interact with E.V.I.L. [or submit imagery of canine familial companions for evaluation], you may direct your inquiries, requests, and comments via T-space enabled Permaweb to the address:

__ForgedAskEvil@gmail.com__

Virtual community access is available via Permaweb under **HEADING_LAZARUS_DISCORD_CHANNEL_THE_FORGED** and may be accessed at the following address:

https://discord.gg/lazarus-comic

Embed scansequence to same follows:

All interactions are subject to security backtrace, analysis, and evaluation, and will be processed on a case-by-case basis.

E.V.I.L. likes dogs.

If you know of a dog of whom E.V.I.L. would approve, please submit nomination information including image and brief explanation for evaluation. Notate submissions as "OK TO PRINT."

This dog is named **CHOCOLATE CHIP CHARLIE**.

E.V.I.L. approves of Charlie because he demonstrates that no canine is too old to learn. He is an old man originally from "Puerto Rico" and only recently learned English. Charlie has grudgingly befriended two cats.

E.V.I.L. is ambivalent about cats.

__SESSION ENDS__

NEXT ISSUE:

For 10,000 years, the Eternal Empire spread across the galaxy, and in all that time there has never been actual first contact with another alien race. This issue, the Forged meet their neighbors. Spoiler: their neighbors are f#!*ing ***PISSED***.

MAY 24, 2023

image®

"All right, Forged. Someone sent us an invite..."

Adventure / SciFi / Space Opera

RATED **M** / MATURE

ZONE